SHRI N. THALAVAI SUNDARAM: I put a specific question. On 12.3.1997, an income-tax raid was conducted by an officer in the house of the West Bengal Chief Minister's close relative. Later on, that income-tax officer was transferred and he was also beaten up. Some politically-motivated murder also took place in Calcutta. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether any action has been taken against the concerned persons who are involved in this murder.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Sir, I have no information on this at present. It does not rise from this question.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Mr. Chairman, Sir, actually there have been a lot of doubts created in the public mind about resignation of Ministers, more so about he recent resignation of hon. Finance Minister's colleague. So what we were expecting in the House was earlier also there had been resignations of Ministers—that the Government would come out with a comprehensive statement in the House since all these developments had been taking place during inter-session periods. There has to be a kind of *suo motu* statement explaining all these developments so that we can clear the doubt that is there in the public mind. I would like to know from the Finance Minister whether the Government is coming out with this kind of a comprehensive statement on all these issues because this affects the credibility of the Government and the larger public confidence in the system.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Sir, I do not think that the credibility of the Government has been affected at all. We have, from time to time, tried to correct the wrong impression which has been created as a result of purely inspired stories in a section of the media. As far as the resignation of the Minister of State, in my Ministry is concerned, he himself has gone on record to say that he has resigned on health grounds. It will entirely be wrong, in my view, to read any more meaning into it. The second point is, we do not feel that there is any need to come out with a comprehensive statement on an issue like this.

Telecommunication and Postal Network in Eastern States

*83. SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI:†
SHRI E. BALANANDAN:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of development proposals for upgradation strengthening/ extension of telecommunication and postal network in the country, State-wise; and

(b) what special measures have been taken to improve the tele-density in the States in Eastern Zone vis-a-vis All India level;

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SMT. SUSHMA SWARAJ): Mr. Chairman, Sir, with due deference to the wishes of my colleague, Mr. Swaminathan. I am reading the answers in English.

(a) It is targetted to provide 36 lakhs new telephone connections during 1998-99. State-wise details are given in Annexure [*See* Appendix 184, Annexure no. 19]. Plan includes provision of village Public Telephones to give telecommunication facilities in villages. It is targetted to provide a net capacity of 4.5 lakh lines in long distance switching. It is also targetted to provide 35,000 Route Kilometres of Optical Fibre systems and 19,500 Route Kilometres of Microwave systems. The State-wise targets are given in Annexure- [*See* Appendix 184, Annexure no. 19].

For long distance connectivity in hilly and remote areas of the country 90 MCPC-VSAT terminals (Multi Channels Per Carrier Very Small Aperture Terminals) and 21 IDR (Intermediate Data Rate) Stations are also planned for

† The question was actually asked on the floor of the house by Shri S. Ramachandran Pillai.

1998-99. State-wise details are given in Annexure [*See* Appendix 184, Annexure no. 19].

The Department of Posts has formulated development proposals for upgradation/strengthening/extension of postal network in the country under Annual Plan 1998-99 (Annexure) and in the draft Ninth Plan (Annexure). [*See* Appendix 184, Annexure no. 19].

State-wise targets are not set in Plan proposals of the Department of Posts. However, Postal Circle-wise targets are fixed under several Plan Programmes, on the basis of proposals received from the Postal Circles.

In 1998-99, targets for opening of Post Offices have been fixed and Communicated to the Postal Circles. (Annexure) [*See* Appendix 184, Annexure no. 19].

(b) While fixing the annual target for new telephone connections, due weightage is given to Telecom Circles where the tele-density is less than the national average in order to improve the tele-density.

SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I seek your protection. My question is specific and concrete. The (b) part of my question is: What special measures have been taken to improve the tele-density in the States in the Eastern Zone, vis-a-vis, All India level. The answer given by the Minister is this: "While fixing the annual target for new telephone connections due weightage is given to the Telecom Circles where the tele-density is less than the national average in order to improve the tele-density." The Minister has not answered my specific question. My question is: What special measures have been taken with regard to the Eastern Zone?

SMT. SUSHMA SWARAJ: Sir, something should be left for the supplementaries also. Is it not? Now I will answer his question, with your permission. In the Eastern States, as yet out of 160 MCPC-VSAT stations, 39 MCPC-VSAT stations are working in the Eastern zone. But in the proposed 90 which are already referred to in the main answer, 37 are proposed for the Eastern zone only., Out of 90, 37 MCPC-VSAT stations are proposed only in the Eastern zone to rationalise this tele-density.

SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI: It is a fact that there are wide disparities with regard to facilities that are available in regard to telephone connections and also in relation to the number of Post Offices. I would like to know from the Minister the reasons for these wide disparities. Is it due to defective planning or is it due to some deliberate discrimination? The second part of my question is this. When can these States catch up with the advanced States? Have you fixed any time-frame for this?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I cannot accuse the previous Governments for defective planning. But the Eastern Zone, which includes the North-East also, is certainly a hilly terrain. There are constraints of terrain also. I can only assure the hon. Member that special emphasis has now been given to planning in the North Eastern States. As he must be aware, a meeting of all the Chief Ministers of the North-Eastern States was held under the Chairmanship of the hon. Prime Minister and special emphasis is being given to planning in the North East, which can remove all these anomalies and disparities in the Eastern region.

SHRI E. BALANANDAN: The hon. Minister was explaining many things. I want to ask a simple question. The North Eastern Zone includes Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. According to the information given by the former Minister two months back, only 30%, 10% and 5% villages in these States are connected with telephones. Therefore, there is a big disparity. Another point is that the average tele density in India is 1.8 per 100 persons. But that doesn't mean

anything for them. It is nothing for them. Therefore, will the Minister consider making special efforts to develop these areas? You know that the North-Eastern terrain is such that people cannot move easily. If there is a telephone connection, it will help them. Therefore, my question is a very ordinary question. You have to apply your mind to see to it that special care of this area is taken. This is my first question.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is not an ordinary question. That is why I am saying that special emphasis will be given to the Eastern Zone. The all-India average tele-density is 1.84. Even that is not very satisfactory. But the tele-density in the Eastern Zone is only 0.73. We have to remove this disparity. While answering the first question I had said it and I had assured the House through the hon. Chairman that we will give special emphasis to remove these disparities.

SHRI E. BALANANDAN: My second question is this, Sir. The Government of India, I am told, is doing corporatisation of DOT. We all know that in 1964 the Government enunciated the policy of privatisation with so many norms. I find that today not a single private operator has come and started anything. Connecting distant areas with telephones connections is a social function, especially those areas where economic conditions are not favourable. We are as a nation interested in serving all the backward areas. Therefore, this attempt at privatisation, or rather corporatisation, will stop our growth. So, will the Minister kindly consider it? Don't go by generalisations. The telecommunication sector is a vital sector. It is a defence-related sector. Kindly, don't give it to the private sector. This is my request. What is your response?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Privatisation of DOT is an entirely separate question, which needs a separate notice. But I can certainly answer with your permission, Sir, that corporatisation of DOT has not been decided as yet. It has been only under active consideration. So far as private operators are concerned, private operators were given licences in six Circles for basic telephones.

Only one will start and that too in the first week of June. I think that will start the day after tomorrow. But corporatisation of DOT or non-corporatisation of DOT, we will not lack in giving facilities to the Eastern region, specially to the North-East. The hon. Member should not express such kind of concern. The DOT will go in full swing to remove this disparity of the Eastern zone, whether DOT is corporatised or not corporatised.

SHRI ONWARD L. NONGTDU: Sir, I would like to know from the Minister whether a specific number of telephone connections have already been decided in favour of Meghalaya State. I would also like to know about the number of telephone exchanges proposed to be opened in Meghalaya during 1998-99.

SMT. SUSHMA SWARAJ: Sir, I have got a list with me which shows cumulative number about the North-East, not of Meghalaya. But, if the hon. Member wants. I can send him detail of proposed telephone connections and telephone exchanges for the State of Meghalaya.

External Assistance for Port Projects

***84. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:**

(a) whether some development projects in the Port Sector are being implemented in the country with external assistance;

(b) if so, what are those projects, port-wise;

(c) the amount of external aid obtained by Government for the projects so far, year-wise; and

(d) the details thereof?